

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 02603 01 OF 02 251311Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 2603

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: SREF TH
SUBJECT: UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE'S JANUARY 23 CALL ON THE AMBASSADOR

REF: BANGKOK 27682 (1977), BANGKOK 2179, BANGKOK 2336

1. SUMMARY: THE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE IN BANGKOK CALLED ON THE AMBASSADOR JANUARY 23. HE BROUGHT UP THE RTG IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS POLICY FOR HANDLING POST-NOVEMBER 15 REFUGEE ARRIVALS. HE URGED GREATER CONCENTRATION ON REFUGEES IN INLAND CAMPS. LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES IN THAILAND SEEMS IN ABEYANCE, BUT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HAS A PLAN FOR THEIR SCHOOLING IN THE CAMPS. END SUMMARY.

2. LESLIE A. GOODYEAR, UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE FOR WESTERN SOUTH ASIA WITH HEADQUARTERS IN BANGKOK, CALLED ON AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE JANUARY 23. THE AMBASSADOR THANKED HIM FOR RECEIVING SEVERAL OFFICIAL AMERICAN VISITORS THE PREVIOUS WEEK, INCLUDING ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN.

3. GOODYEAR DISCUSSED THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF GILBERT JAEGER, DIRECTOR OF THE UNHCR'S PROTECTION DIVISION, UPON JAEGER'S RETURN TO GENEVA FROM THAILAND (REFTEL A). JAEGER PRESENTED TO
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 02603 01 OF 02 251311Z

SADRUDDIN AGA KHAN THREE OPTIONS FOR DETERMINING REFUGEE BONA FIDES IN THAILAND . THEY WERE 100 PER CENT UNHCR SCREENING OF EACH CASE; NO UNHCR PARTICIPATION; AND SELECTIVE INTERVENTION. THE FIRST OPTION WAS NOT FEASIBLE FOR TWO REASONS: THE RTG WOULD REJECT IT AS AN INFRINGEMENT OF ITS SOVEREIGNTY TO PERMIT OUTSIDE PARTICIPATION IN ITS DECISION MAKING, AND THE UNHCR SIMPLY DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH MANPOWER FOR SUCH A PROGRAM. THE

SECOND OPTION WAS EQUALLY UNSATISFACTORY ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS. GOODYEAR IMPLIED THAT SADRUDDIN, THOUGH RELUCTANT TO TAKE ANY DECISION DURING HIS CLOSING DAYS IN OFFICE, RECOMMENDED SELECTIVE INTERVENTION TO HIS SUCCESSOR.

4. GOODYEAR THEN COMMENTED ON RTG IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY SINCE NOVEMBER 15. THE PROBLEM WAS THAT EACH GOVERNOR APPLIED PROCEDURES AS HE INTERPRETED THEM. THERE WAS MUCH GOOD WILL ON THE PART OF DISTRICT AND PRISON OFFICIALS, BUT THEY WERE OBVIOUSLY LOOKING FOR GUIDANCE FROM BANGKOK. GOODYEAR ADDED THAT DAMRONG SOONTHORN SARATUN, THE PRINCIPAL INTERIOR MINISTRY OFFICIAL CONCERNED WITH REFUGEES, HAD URGED HIM NOT TO WORRY ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW POLICY, AND TO LET THE THAI KNOW ABOUT SPECIAL CASES THAT THE UNHCR WAS INTERESTED IN. THE THAI HAD APPARENTLY SENT NO REFUGEES BACK FROM NORTH THAILAND OR FROM ALONG THE CAMBODIAN BORDER. ACCORDING TO GOODYEAR, THERE WERE REPORTS, HOWEVER, THAT THE THAI OFFICIALS IN SOME CASES HAD QUIETLY SENT SMALL GROUPS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH A COUPLE SACKS OF RICE, BACK ACROSS THE MEKONG BY BOAT AT NIGHT IN AREAS SAFE FROM OBSERVATION BY LAO OFFICIALS.

5. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED HOW MANY NON-BOAT CASE REFUGEES HAD ARRIVED IN THAILAND SINCE THE NOVEMBER 15 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW RTG POLICY. GOODYEAR SAID THAT SOME 1500 HAD COME IN, AND ABOUT 500 OF THEM WERE HAVING SOME DIFFICULTY WITH THAI AUTHORITIES. THE RTG HAD ALMOST REACHED THE POINT OF REQUESTING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 02603 01 OF 02 251311Z

THE UNHCR TO PROVIDE THE FUNDS FOR FEEDING ALL OF THEM. THE THREE CAMPS THE RTG ARE BUILDING FOR THESE REFUGEES ARE DESIGNED TO HOLD ONLY 500 EACH.

6. GOODYEAR SPECULATED THAT MFA UNDERSECRETARY WONG PHONNIKON MIGHT TAKE UP THE SUBJECT OF REFUGEE REPATRIATION, AMONG OTHER QUESTIONS, DURING HIS VIENTIANE VISIT. WHILE THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF EMOTION GENERATED ON BOAT CASES, GOODYEAR FELT THAT THE GREATEST ATTENTION NEEDED TO BE GIVEN TO THE INLAND CAMPS, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE BOAT CASE ISSUE IN THAILAND SEEMED AT LEAST TEMPORARILY UNDER CONTROL, AND MORE LEAVING THAN ARRIVING.

7. GOODYEAR SAID THAT HE WAS POEASED THAT AN IMMIGRATION OFFICER WAS ON THE SPOT IN SONGKHLA JANUARY 15 AND TOOK THE ACTION HE DID TO PREVENT 34 REFUGEES FROM BEING TURNED OUT TO SEA (REFTEL B), BUT OBVIOUSLY WE COULD NOT BE BLACKMAILED IN THAT MANNER ON EVERY BOAT. HE MENTIONED THAT IN REGARD TO THE BOAT OF 16 (REFTEL C), HE HAD, AT OUR URGING, TELEPHONED PHIRAPHONG KASEMSI, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION AFFAIRS AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. PHIRAPHONG HAD IN TURN CONTACTED

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 02603 02 OF 02 251307Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 2603

DAMRONG WHO TOLD THE VICE GOVERNOR TO TAKE FOREIGN RELATIONS INTO ACCOUNT IN MAKING HIS DECISIONS ABOUT REFUGEES. (DAMROT TOLD US SEPARATELY THAT HE HAD MADE CLEAR TO SONGKHLA AUTHORITIES PRIMIN'S POLICY OF NOT REFUSING ANY BOAT CASES AND THAT THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER SUCH INCIDENTS.)

8. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED GOODYEAR WHETHER HE HAD ANY IMPRESSION THAT THE CONDITIONS WERE IMPROVING FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND. GOODYEAR SAID THAT THE THAI HAD BEEN CLOSER TO SUCH AN ACTION LAST SEPTEMBER THAN THEY ARE CURRENTLY. WHILE THERE WERE HINTS OF RESUSCITATING THE IDEAS OF SETTLEMENTS, INCLUDING ETHNIC THAI CLOSE TO THE BORDER, GOODYEAR BELIEVES THE RTG REMAINS DETERMINED FIRST TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS IN COUNTRY BY MOVEMENT ABROAD AND EVENTUAL VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION. IF AN RTG/LPDR AGREEMENT ON VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION EMERGED, THE UNHCR MIGHT BE WILLING TO CONSIDER FUNDING A SMALL PILOT PROJECT BUT ONLY IF IT WERE COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY. (GOODYEAR THOUGHT THE PROSPECTS FOR FINDING VOLUNTEERS TO BE NIL.)

9. GOODYEAR COMMENTED THAT MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES FROM THAILAND HAD BEEN SMOOTH DURING 1977. SOME 25,000 REFUGEES LEFT FOR ABROAD, BUT THE EXODUS COULD NOT KEEP WITH THE REFUGEE INFLUX. GOODYEAR OBSERVED THAT THE VARIOUS COUNTRIES OF TRADITIONAL
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 02603 02 OF 02 251307Z

IMMIGRATION WERE WORKING WELL TOGETHER IN THAILAND. IF A FEW

OTHER COUNTRIES TOOK AS MANY REFUGEES AS FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES, THE THAI PROBLEM WOULD BE CONSIDERABLY REDUCED. THE AMBASSADOR MENTIONED THAT THE RTG HAD PRESSED ASSSSTANT SECRETARY DERIAN ON THIS POINT, AND THAT SHE HAD REPLIED THAT SHE WOULD BE DISCUSSING THE NEED FOR GREATER ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES WITH THE OTHER INTERESTED GOVERNMENTS.

10. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR ON JANUARY 23 HAD SUGGESTED A GOOD RESPONSE TO THE THAI CONTENTION THAT COUNTRIES OF TRADITIONAL IMMIGRATION TOOK THE CREAM OF THE REFUGEE CROP. THE OBVIOUS ANSWER WAS THAT UNTIL THE THAIS INITIATE A LOCAL SETTLEMENT PROJECT, THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE FOR THESE INDIVIDUALS. GOODYEAR OBSERVED THAT IF THE THAI LET THE CREAM GO SOUR, THAT WAS THEIR FAULT.

11. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED ABOUT SELF-HELP PROJECTS. GOODYEAR SAID THAT REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE WAS POSSIBLE ONLY OUTSIDE THE GATES OF THE CAMP. THOSE IN THE NORTH OFFERED PERHAPS THE ONLY POSSIBILITIES FOR AGRICULTURAL EXPANSION OUTSIDE CAMP BOUNDARIES.

12. GOODYEAR, JUST BEFORE DEPARTURE, RAISED A TOPIC THAT IS NEW TO US. HE SAID THE THAI MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HAS A PLAN FOR THAI SCHOOLING IN ALL THE CAMPS. THE BUDGET IS RELATIVELY MODEST, APPROXIMATELY \$500,000 FOR THE FIRST YEAR. THE MINISTRY WANTS UNHCR TO PAY FOR ALL THE COSTS, BUT THE UNHCR MIGHT AGREE TO ABOUT ONLY \$350,000 TO COVER BUILDING AND EQUIPMENT. THE UNHCR WOULD DELCINE TO PAY THE BALANCE OF THE COSTS, WHICH ARE FOR TEACHERS' SALARIES. THE RTG WAS NOW ASKING VOLUNTARY AGENCIES FOR THIS SUM. THE AMBASSADOR OBSERVED THAT THAI EDUCATION COULD BE A STEP TOWARD LOCAL SETTLEMENT.

WHITEHOUSE

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 02603 02 OF 02 251307Z

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